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**STEREOTYPING MUSLIM WOMEN'S IDENTITIES THROUGH HIJAB
IN THE WEST: A STUDY OF COUNTER STEREOTYPES IN HOME FIRE
AND THREE DAUGHTERS OF EVE**

Abid Nawaz Khan¹, Inam Ullah², Imdad Ullah Khan^{3*}, Nadia Gul⁴, Gul Andama⁵

¹Department of English, Riphah International University, Pakistan.

²(Ph.D Scholar) Department of Linguistics, University of Haripur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

^{3*}Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Swat, Pakistan,
Imdad.Khan@uswat.edu.pk, ORCID: 0000-0002-7933-901X

⁴Higher Education Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

⁵Department of English, Women University Swabi, Pakistan.

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Abstract

There has been a growing controversy surrounding the use of Hijab in the West. The fashion invites mixed responses globally; however, the majority of the Western population deems it a symbol of religious fanaticism, a marker of gender oppression and an obstacle to good community relations. The feelings have even crept into the policy circles and a score of

countries, France being the pioneer, have banned it. However, Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* and Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* dispel stereotypical representation and negate its role in obstructing the social interaction of Muslim women in the West. The study contends that hijab neither promotes radical tendencies nor restricts Muslim women way of life in the West. The stereotypical representation is promoted by the rising islamophobia and racism. This is a qualitative study based on the two novels. The analysis is developed around the theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhaba's Cultural Hybridity and Victor Turner's Liminality. The study, unlike the common perception, concludes that migrants become culturally hybrid and hijab neither reflects radical tendencies nor in any way restricts Muslim women way of life, the negative connotations are triggered by the islamophobia, ethnocentrism, dwindling plurality and multiculturalism in the Western society.

Introduction

“Dangerous, scary, intriguing, threatening, intimidating, oppressive, irritating, aggressive, traditional, conservative and reactionary” are some of the adjectives commonly used in Europe concerning hijab (Amiriaux, 2007). As the Liberal Internationalism is losing ground, there is a noted upsurge in resistance to immigration, growing social intolerance to exotic signs and symbols, and the revival of constructing walls and fences along the borders. The attitude is characterized by a tendency towards glorifying one's history and traditions in their various manifestations as a substitute to the dwindling liberal order (Harari, 2018). The hostility towards veil in West is driven by western ethnocentrism, intolerance to out-groups, conservation of values and culture, anti-immigrants prejudice, racism and fading universalism (Saroglou, Lamkaddem, Van Pachterbeke & Buxant, 2009). The tendency of narrowing down space for the veil in the Western society is a reflection of xenophobia, if a society is intolerant of immigrants in general, no wonder why headscarf, being a symbol of external presence, is abhorred, and Islamophobia is one of its aspects (Helbling, 2014). The headscarf issue highlights the dwindling space between public and private- and secular and religious spheres in the European social fabric. The view that cultural differences and personal choice of social ways and dressing as unbecoming- runs counter to the spirit of democracies that stand for equality and freedom of citizens (Amiriaux, 2007). Ever since the period of colonization, the colonizers and other imperial nations are out to look down upon other cultures, customs and traditions of the people of the third world (I. Ullah, et al., 2020), hijab is not an exception in this regard.

According to Noll (2010), the hostility towards hijab is driven by psychological factors, especially the attitude towards minority groups in western societies. It is the ultimate manifestation of increased discrimination, social isolation and marginalization of the minority by the majority in Europe. The action is aimed at striking uniformity in the society, however, trampling upon the rights and liberties of a section of society can cause conflict and division within the society. Whereas to McGoldrick (2006), the rationale behind the hostility towards the headscarf is the negative connotations permeating in the host society. The majority of the population interprets it as a symbol of women's oppression, a marker of gender imbalance, and a sign of patriarchy. Anna (2011), argues that the level of tolerance, ethnic, cultural- and religious diversity, and the dynamics of integration and plurality have fed into the attitudes which need to be reassessed and mutually understood. The concept of integration, a frequently cited factor behind the hijab controversy, needs to be understood as a two-way process: the migrants require

adaptability to the new reality they are faced with, whereas the host society on the other hand needs to acknowledge the presence of migrants and the changing character of its social fabric.

Al-Saji (2010), holds that hijab itself is not the problem but the cultural racism in Europe has engendered the controversy that has led to its stereotypical representation. The object is to create a binary opposition between the migrants' cultural signs and symbols and that of the host culture, and thereby portray positively the Western construction of gender and non-Western the other way round. Sharma (2014), views that the controversy is a part of the plethora of challenges Europe has been faced with for the last few decades. Among them, cultural conflict and the integration of Others (migrants) stand out. The straight-jacket policy initiatives advanced by most of the countries trample over the rights and liberties of the minorities and give birth to conflict, division, and prejudice.

The identity politics, according to Ismail (2004), which is meant to reflect a difference in terms of social ways and modes of representation in the public sphere is becoming culturally intolerable. Hijab being a maker of difference and symbol of public recognition is one of its manifestations. Lettinga and Sawitri (2012), hold that the migrants' accommodation policies shift over time and are influenced by the state's interaction with other institutions notably the church. The change can more be seen in terms of state and church relation than the shift in the integration model itself. Whereas to Modood, Triandafyllidou and Barrero (2006), in the wake of identity anxiety brought about by globalization, the states focus more on the loyalty and allegiance of their members and society. The drive results in dwindling space for multiculturalism. The headscarf affair questions the space available for multiculturalism in practice which tells upon the principle of tolerance, right of dissent, individual liberty, and human rights. Ajala (2017), holds that the dressing choice of the young Muslim migrants has been influenced by the new trends and styles of the host society in the West. Their cultural form of dress has been reinterpreted, which reflects different modes of identity and hybrid practice of dressing, therefore, it cannot be strictly associated with any culture. The practice of veiling by Muslim women, according to Kulenovic (2006), does not manifest their Islamic denomination rather it is a reflection of postmodern identity based on modernity. The veil is interpreted by the observer differently than the person wearing it. It is not a reaction to assimilation and modernity rather a move in the direction. It does not stand for any religious identity rather is an appeal for recognition of diversity and plurality. Whereas to Afshar (2008), the hijab issue aims at creating a modern form of Orientalism that objectifies and represents the veiling women as Other of the Western society and less empowered and oppressed. The stereotypical representation of a section of society hampers the process of integration in the European countries.

Statement of the Problem

Hijab has been a subject of heated controversy in Europe, social intolerance, public abhorrence and legal restrictions can be witnessed against it in most of the European countries. The attitude is based on the perception that hijab restricts women's freedom, denies them agency and empowerment, and is a marker of religious fanaticism, gender imbalance and hampers community relations and civic integration in European society. The study, through analysing the private, public and interpersonal life of hijab-wearing Muslim women in Britain, explores whether hijab really acts as a barrier for Muslim women in European society or it is merely a stereotypical representation? The study finds the Muslim women with hijab breaking the stereotypes and enjoying their freedom on a par with the women of the host society. The study

ferrets out that how hijab, with so many negative connotations, simply proves a piece of garment used out of one's own accord which neither restricts women's freedom nor makes them harbor radical outlook nor hampers community relations on their part. The Muslim women with hijab, instead of conforming strictly to either of the culture, turn out to be culturally hybrid and the same goes for their choice of dress.

Theoretical Framework

The study is conducted under the theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha's construct "Cultural Hybridity" and Victor Turner's "Liminality".

Turner (1967), holds that the state of liminality remains detached from the attributes of both the past as well of the future. Features of liminality are ambiguous and are outside of all the society's standard classification. According to Turner (1969), "during the liminal movements between social identities, the individuals find themselves betwixt and between position normally assigned by law, custom, convention and ceremony, where they experience a suspension or reversal of the normal rules of living" (pp. 94-95). The liminal separation from both the previous and the future ways of life is demonstrated through a physical departure from the former milieu. The liminal characters are always ambiguous which is reflected through symbols, therefore it is important to analyze symbols and social actions (Turner, 1974).

Bhabha (1994), propounds on the transitory aspects of identity. According to Bhabha we find ourselves in a world marked by cultural differences and the interconnected system of globalization with a large number of migrants across the globe, the old concepts of the formation of cultural identities have undergone a huge change. As a result, we, "find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (p.1). These cultural differences and the in-between spaces serve as a base for recreating new identities and elaborate strategies of selfhood-singular or communal that initiate new signs of identity. The in-between space connects past and present and functions as a transitional phase to help migrants reinvent their identities. Bhabha holds hybridity as a process, "when other denied knowledge enters upon the dominant discourse and estranges the basis of its authority- its rule of recognition," (p.114). Hybridity, being a third space, paves the way for other positions to surface.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study based on a textual interpretation of the passages from the two novels. The study, in particular, takes into account the relevant structures, expressions, and passages that demonstrate cultural hybridity and the state of liminality on part of the major characters of the novels in their personal, social and interpersonal ways of life. The study relies on Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire* (2017) and Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016) as the primary sources of the data for analysis.

Analysis

The analysis is divided into two sections; the first views the use of hijab in the context of religious fanaticism, women's submission and gender imbalance. The second section of the analysis takes into account the various factors that have stereotyped hijab as a symbol of

'Otherness' and a cause of social seclusion. The section ferrets out that whether hijab itself is the problem or other underlying reasons have triggered its stereotypical representation.

I. Religious Fanaticism, Women's Submission, and Gender Imbalance; Hijab and the Counter Stereotypes

Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* and Elif Shafak's *Three Daughters of Eve* are set in London and revolves around the lives of two Muslim girls Aneeka and Mona. Aneeka is a Pakistani descendent teenager and Mona is of Egyptian ancestry who studies at Oxford University. Both of them wear hijab as an integral part of their dress. Their -private, social, and interpersonal ways of life demonstrate hijab merely a piece of garment chosen out of their own accord, which neither restricts their freedom nor reflects the stereotypical representation and the negative connotations associated with it in the dominant Western discourse. They are obsessed with the hijab, however, their representation of hijab runs counter to the the stereotypical representation.

Aneeka meets Eamonn who happens to deliver their family parcel sent by her elder sister Isma from America. Aneeka greets the family guest quite friendly in his first visit to her home, "Eamonn stood up, conscious of his greasy fingers and of his interest in the question of how he might use them to unpin the white hijab that framed her face" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 64). Despite the presence of other elderly members of her family, she entertains the guest without any family restrictions. Having served Emmon with tea, Aneeka asks him, " And Mr. Lone, since you have delivered the M&M's you can leave with me... at the end of the street then she turned sharply on her heels to face him 'what is going on here?' (Shamsie, 2017, p.65). She befriends Eamonn just the way other girls of the host society can do without any patriarchal restrictions. Though Aneeka wears a hijab it does not restrict her to greet the male guest on his first visit, she befriends him and sees him off. Aneeka's demeanor reflects her as an independent person who enjoys the right of personal mobility without any restrictions, she acts in contravention to the patriarchal regulations. Hijab in the west is believed as an obstacle that confines women's liberty and right to free movement, as McGoldrick (2006) holds, is contradicted by Aneeka's demeanor. Aneeka's get-up and demeanor project her more a hybrid and 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1969 & Bhabha, 1994) than a stereotypical girl with hijab always subjected to restrictions and lives a dependent life.

While accompanying Eamonn, Aneeka encounters a passerby:

A man in a bright-red suit that appeared not to have been washed in several years stopped next to Aneeka and held out a filthy square of fur. 'Have you met my cat?' Before Eamonn could chivalrously interpose himself, Aneeka was reaching out to stroke the matted fur as if it were the smoothest mink. 'Of Course I've met Mog Mog Charlie. She and I are old Friends.' The man made a happy noise, tucked the fur into his jacket, against his heart and carried on. (Shamsie, 2017, p.66)

According to Anna (2011), hijab in the western countries is believed as an obstacle to good community relations and social interaction. The general perception about such women is their being unsociable and frosty disposition which the host countries believe as a factor causing division within their social fabric. Aneeka is purposelessly accosted by a stranger on her way, she pretends acquaintance and politely responds to the stranger's interference, which otherwise amounts to bothering or harassment. Aneeka's reaction defies the stereotypical representation of hijab in the West which is believed as a symbol of unsociable disposition and introverted

personality. She combines in herself traits of both the culture of her origin and that of the host society- and is a culturally hybrid person. (Bhaba, 1994).

Aneeka, asks him, “Do you live alone? Aneeka said. ‘yes’. ‘Take me there.’ She freely acts out of her own will without any implicit or explicit restrictions being imposed on her due to her faith or dress. She does not mind accompanying Eamonn to his flat where he lives alone:

She shook her head, dipped a finger into the coffee foam, checking its depth, didn't meet his eye. Why are you here” didn't seem like a question he could ask, and might make her leave, which he didn't think he wanted, although it was hard to know what to want of a silent beautiful woman in a hijab sipping coffee in your flat. (Shamsie, 2017, p. 68)

Afshar (2008) argues that girls with hijab in Europe are assumed as Other of Western society and deemed as less empowered and generally oppressed. The assumptions have fed into the growing hostility against them in most of the European countries. Aneeka breaks such stereotypes, she exercises freedom to the maximum level. Eamonn is not even distantly related to her family, but yet she develops friendly ties with him and her hijab does not restrict any choice she makes in her life just the way other girls of the host society can do. Hijab remains only a garment of her choice not an obstacle in the free exercise of her will. Her disposition projects her 'in-between' and of hybrid nature.(Turner,1967 & Bhaba, 1994). Aneeka's hijab does not obstruct her natural impulse and she, therefore, does not lose touch with it. “She unpinned the hijab, folded it carefully and placed it between the two of them on the kitchen counter” (Shamsie 2017, p. 68). Hijab serves as a marker of identity and public recognition in the case of the Muslim diaspora in the European countries, the growing social intolerance and lack of space for differences in social ways result in the controversy over hijab.(Ismail, 2004).Aneeka puts on hijab in public to assert her identity and claim public recognition but it does not hamper her life in private as it is widely assumed in the West:

At the daybreak, he woke to discover she'd risen from the bed to which they'd finally made their way. Hearing the sound of the shower so early, he thought she was planning to leave without saying goodbye....He swung himself out of the bed and walked into the living room to find her praying, a towel as her prayer mat, the hijab nothing more than a scarf loosely covering her head without the elaborate pinning or the tightly fitted cap beneath. (Shamsie, 2017, p.71)

Aneeka develops a physical relationship with Eamonn and spends nights in his flat. Her demeanor reflects traits that combine the two cultures and projects her as a hybrid figure. She lives an independent life, dates her boyfriend and spends nights with him.. But in spite of all the liberty Aneeka exercises, she keeps wearing her hijab and tries to maintain a symbolic relationship with it. Contrary to the general perception, hijab does not bar her from any choice she makes in her life which is in vogue in the host society (Bhaba, 1994). The choice of dressing of the young Muslim migrants in the West has been influenced by the growing trends in the host societies. It seems a miscalculation to associate ideological basis with the dress of the migrants. As Aneeka reflects, the migrants identify as hybrid and cannot be classified strictly into either of the cultures (Ajala, 2017).Aneeka always remains in touch with her hijab whatever action she performs, but never feels restricted nor thwarted by it. “ ...Aneeka standing up from her prayer mat and walking into his embrace, shedding her clothes along the way until only the hijab remained ” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 88). Even during the intimate moments when she gets undressed, she keeps her hijab intact. Aneeka's hijab symbolically reflects her identity, and her actions

demonstrate her freedom of choice. Her disposition defies the negative connotations and the generic assumptions about hijab. Hijab does not manifest religious attachment or radical and fanatic mindset, but is an attempt of public recognition. It has always been the problem and the source of the controversy that hijab is interpreted by the observer differently than the person who wears it (Kulenovic, 2006).

Aneeka, while thinking of her proposed trip to Pakistan, reminds herself of her hybrid status to be looked upon by her relatives, “ .. blood ties give them the right to interrogate and lecture and point to the sisters’ hijabs as proof that British Pakistanis were ‘caught in the past’ and point to their jeans to prove they were mixed up” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 202). Being a migrant she is aware of her assimilation into the social values and cultural practices of the host society. Her get-up is symbolic of her hybrid identity, hijab shows her roots and the jeans manifest the route.

The notions of radicalism and fundamentalism are commonly associated with Hijab which counts for one of the factors in the hostility towards it (Helbling, 2014). Unlike the commonly assumed view, Aneeka’s attachment to religion is too moderate and does not reflect any extremism. Having spent the night with Eamonn, Aneeka wakes up early leaving Eamonn in bed. Surprisingly Eamonn spots her praying in the living room using a towel as her prayer mat, “the hijab nothing more alien than a scarf loosely covering her head.. prostrating herself to God in the room where she’d been down on her knees for a very different purpose just hours earlier” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 70). As a migrant, Aneeka balances her life along the lines of the two cultures. She is fully entitled to the freedom she desires, but yet she keeps wearing her hijab and says the prayer. Aneeka’s demeanor runs counter to the notion about the conflict of the cultures and lack of assimilation on part of the migrants, she viably combines traits of both cultures as a hybrid person (Bhaba, 1994). Even her view of religion and its practices, unlike the traditional dogmatic approach, are quite moderate and opinionated. On being asked about the very purpose of prayer by Eamonn, Aneeka responds, “ prayer isn’t about transaction, Mr. Capitalist. It’s about starting the day right” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 70). She takes her obligatory religious practices as mere optional rituals that could be offered out of one’s own choice. Aneeka’s moderate and unconventional view of her religion rules out the assumed religious extremism in women with hijab in the European countries. (Nawaz, 2019)

Aneeka’s personal view of hijab contradicts the stereotypical notions that are in vogue in the Western society. She takes it as a boundary between private and social life. While leaving Eamonn’s flat, she puts on her hijab, on being asked by Eamonn about its purpose, Aneeka says, “I get to choose which parts of me I want strangers to look at , and which are for you” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 72). Drawing a demarcation line between private and public life is one’s own choice and such exercise is symbolic of one’s freedom and empowerment and not vice versa. Aneeka is quite moderate and liberal when it comes to religious beliefs, and rules out the possibility of religious fundamentalism in her approach. On being asked about the concept of hell and heaven, she puts, “-Only as parables. A god of mercy wouldn’t condemn any of his creation to eternal suffering” (Shamsie, 2017, p. 195). Aneeka’s view about life hereafter stands in contrast to her religious views about the life hereafter, and negates her inclination to fundamentalism and religious extremism, which are the concepts generally associated with such women in the Western society.

Mona is an active student at Oxford and has interests in diverse areas:

Besides championing feminism, Mona was involved in a series of volunteer activities: Aid to Balkans Society, Friends of Palestine Society, Sufi Studies Society, Migration Studies and Oxford Islamic Society where she was one of the leading members. She was about to launch a 'hip-hop society' because she loved the music. Drawing on her encounter with diverse cultures, she wrote lyrics, hoping that one day someone would rap them (Shafak, 2016, p.128)

Mona is an active student at Oxford, she wears a hijab as an integral part of her dress. The range of her extra-curricular activities explains her social standing and extrovert mood of personality. Hijab does not domesticate her vision nor in any way, she feels restricted in her social life. The sphere of her extra-curricular activities shows the amount of freedom she enjoys. By advocating feminism, Mona's disposition counters the assumption of gender oppression and women submission, a reservation persistently made by the Western feminists about women with hijab. "When Peri and Mona left the pub, unnoticed, it was a full moon. Passing under the Bridge of Sighs, they would their way through the dimly lit side streets" (p.137). Mona lives her life to the full, without any restrictions imposed by her faith or her hijab ever crossing radical thoughts into her mind. Being a progressive and liberal-minded girl, she visits a pub and have late-night gatherings without any kind of limitations. She continues, "of course my parents always gave me the option. My hijab is a personal decision, a testimony to my faith. It gives me peace and confidence" (Shafak, 2016, p. 136). Mona's figure stands in stark contrast to the assumed notion of male dominance and women's submission. By declaring hijab something chosen out of her own consent she challenges patriarchal order and asserts women's power of decision making in matters pertaining to their life. By wearing hijab Mona demonstrates attachment to her origin/roots, whereas by conforming to the social practices which are in vogue in the host society, as Ismail(2004) observes, she projects herself as a culturally hybrid person retaining traits of both the cultures (Turner, 1969 & Bhaba, 1994).

If I with my headscarf don't challenge the stereotypes, who is going to do it for me? I want to shake things up. People look at me as if I'm passive, obedient victim of male power. Well, I'm not. I have a mind of my own. My hijab has never got in the way of my independence. (Shafak, 2016, p. 136)

By breaking the stereotypes through active participation in various associations and students unions at Oxford, Mona becomes a vicarious proponent of hijab. She figures herself as an independent and empowered person which flies in the face of stereotypical representation of the women with hijab. Mona is out to counter all sort of negative connotations and stereotypes associated with her way of dressing. She neither feels confined nor in any way lags behind other girls in her private and social life due to hijab. The view about hijab as being a sign of women's submission and a marker of gender inequality McGoldrick (2006), is dispelled by Mona declaring herself not a submissive entity dictated by male power and patriarchal order. She rules out the assumed notion of hijab being foisted on her but wearing it out of her own choice. Hijab, Mona asserts, neither obstructs her life nor in any way restricts her independence. Mona's experience with the hijab reflects that it, unlike the stereotypical representation, neither negates women's agency nor makes them a victim of male power in any form.

2. Assimilation versus Social Exclusion; Is Hijab the real Problem?

Aneeka and Mona's way of life showcases them culturally hybrid and bears witness to the fact that migrants in general are more in conformity with the values and practices of the host culture

than that of their origin. Hybridity itself is based on the uneven proportion of the two cultures, it is the host culture that shapes it, and that of the migrants' origin is reduced to the minimum extent in the hybrid mix, Ahmad (1995) contends. Being migrant in the United Kingdom, Aneeka and Mona counter the stereotypes about hijab through a practical demonstration which run counter to the generally perceived notion about hijab as being a sign of immigrants' unwillingness to assimilate into the Western societies and a rejection of the Western values (McGoldrick 2006). Having proved that hijab itself is not a problem both Aneeka and Mona despite of their hybrid composition and well-entrenched posture into the host culture, are subjected to discriminatory treatment. They are openly ostracized and not accorded due civic status (Al-Saji, 2010). The attitude of the host society reflects dwindling space for multiculturalism, intolerance to outgroups, racism, fading universalism and rising ethnocentrism and Islamophobia (Saroglou et al., 2009)

Aneeka, while on his way to Eamonn's, is humiliated and mistreated merely on account of her hijab. "Some guy spat at me on the Tube... you are making it OK to stigmatize people for the way they dress?" (Shamsie, 2017, p.90). The Home Secretary in his speech exhorts the Muslims to conform to the British way of life and abandon their own culture and values for good. He considers the Muslim culture and dressing a hurdle in their assimilation into the host culture. Public opinion is turned against them and Aneeka is faced with mistreatment in public. She addresses Eamonn:

Do you say, what kind of idiot stands in front of a group of teenagers and tells them to conform? Do you say, why didn't you mention that among the things this country will let you achieve if you're Muslim is torture, rendition, detention without trial, airport interrogation, spies in mosques teachers reporting your children to the authorities for wanting a world without British injustice. (Shamsie, 2017, p. 90)

Despite her hybrid disposition and being assimilated into the host culture and values, Aneeka complains against the authorities' hostile attitude in general and that of the public in particular towards her community. She is part and parcel of the society and conforms to its cultural practices, but the discriminatory attitude meted out to her, raises her eyebrows. She laments that it is her origin that makes her a suspect in public places, no matter how well she might be engaged into the host society. She adds, "Home Secretaries talking about people setting themselves apart in the way they dress" (Shamsi, 2017, p. 90). The statement of the official openly repels the advances she makes for assimilation into the British culture and society. Eamonn's father when learns that his son's girlfriend wears hijab, takes exception to it and advises his son to make her abandon it. "Anyway, if she's only nineteen, I suspect she can be persuaded out of the hijab in time. Get your sister to take her off to the hair salon next time she comes to visit". (Shamsie, 2017, p. 107). Despite her culturally hybrid nature, Aneeka is still not accepted into the host society and the Home Secretary wants her to abandon every sign of her origin. The remarks are symptomatic of the dwindling space for multiculturalism, growing eurocentrism and Islamophobia (Helbling, 2014).

Mona, a liberal, feminist and social activist, feels offended by the remarks about her, the only reason behind the negative remarks is her headscarf, a symbol of external presence. "People who don't know anything about Islam, make gross generalization about my religion, my prophet, my faith", she added quickly, and my headscarf". (Shafak, 2016, pp. 221, 22). She finds her person amid stringent criticism, her faith and her dress are the targets in the host population. Lack of

tolerance surrounds her person in the society, despite the advances she makes, the liberal thoughts she harbors, the concept of co-existence she exhibits both as an individual and as a member of the civil society (Sharma, 2014):

May be because we're under attack" siad Mona. Every day I have to defend myself when I've done nothing wrong. I'm expected to prove that I'm not a potential suicide bomber, I feel under scrutiny all the time-do you know how lonely that is?" (Shafak, 2016, p. 310)

Mona starts growing disappointed with the British society and feels neither secure nor at liberty to dress in her desired manner. Her liberal approach, cultural hybridity and open mindedness are not reciprocated merely on account of her hijab, an exotic symbol. She feels harassed and starts complaining about the attitudes of the people around her. The public response puts her under observation and pushes her into a state of social exclusion. "You know nothing, said Mona, 'I have been bullied, called names, pushed off the bus, treated as if I were dumb- all because of my headscarf. You've no idea how horribly I've been treated! It's just a small piece of cloth'" (Shafak, 2016, p.310). Mona reiterates that hijab is nothing more than a piece of cloth that is deliberately being associated with so many negative connotations and suggested meanings. The public response is intolerable and humiliation at public places is the usual reaction she experiences. Mona's hijab invites responses which are against the ethics and general propriety in any civilized society. The opinion about hijab is triggered by the fact that hijab symbolizes outgroup existence in the society which is not tolerated, and the dwindling space for multiculturalism therein. (Modood et al.,2006)

"Then why do you wear it? It is my choice, my identity! I am not bothered by your ways, why are you bothered my mine? Who is the liberal here, think!" (Shafak, 2016, p. 310). Mona projects women with hijab quite democratic, liberal and open-minded unlike the common stereotypes of radicalism and intolerance. She reiterates her power of decision-making and shows hijab as a manifestation of it. However, her approach seeks reciprocation which is wanting in a society that always champions liberal and democratic values. She points to the dwindling state of secular and liberal values of the European countries which are losing their accommodating disposition (Harari, 2018). Mona questions the social assimilation process which should be a two-way process, she shows herself being adapted to the values of the host society but the society is intolerant with her mode of dressing. She highlights the need for adaptability with the migrants on part of the host society as well (Anna, 2011). If the society objects to her dressing and she is tolerant and respects other's way of life through a liberal and democratic disposition, then hijab does not manifest a rigid and harsh stance, but the host society on the other hand does:

Let me make one thing clear, Mona said, once again turning to Shirin. I don't have anything against atheists, or gays or drag queens. It's their life. But I do mind Islamophobes. If you are going to sound like a warmongering neo-con, I had better move out of this house.(Shafak, 2016, p. 311)

Mona, during a discussion on the subject of hijab, vehemently voices her stance of co-existence and tolerant disposition towards other fellow citizens, no matter whatever belief system they uphold, social or cultural group they are part of and the way of life they chose, she is perfectly comfortable with them. But why the host society is uneasy about her hijab and critical of her way of life, which is her personal choice. But the fact remains that it is not the hijab itself, but the growing Islamophobia, dwindling space for multiculturalism and eroding verges of the secular

values of the European countries which have turned them uneasy with the signs and symbols which indicate external presence. The stereotypes are used to justify the growing discrimination against the migrants and justify their approach of social isolation and marginalization of the minority by the majority. (Noll, 2010)

Aneeka and Mona, Muslim women with hijab in the United Kingdom, project themselves culturally hybrid and showcase hijab as a symbol of their identity which neither restricts nor in any way obstructs their way of life. Their representation of hijab counters all the stereotypes associated with it in the dominant Western discourse. They demonstrate that hijab itself is not the problem, but the controversy has been triggered by the growing ethnocentrism, racism, rising Islamophobia and the dwindling state of secular and liberal values in European countries which, according to Sharma (2014), trample over rights and liberties of the minorities in these countries.

Conclusion

The growing intolerance and the hostile reactions against hijab in Europe is being backed by certain stereotypes. Hijab is widely assumed as a symbol of women submission, a radical mindset, an obstacle to good community relations and a bar to social assimilation. The study shows that *Home Fire* and *Three Daughters of Eve*, both being set in the United Kingdom, dispel the stereotypes and negative connotations associated with hijab by projecting the women with hijab in every walk of life in the Western society. Both Aneeka and Mona, being migrants in the United Kingdom, are culturally hybrid and have adapted themselves to the cultural practices and values of the host society, (Turner, 1967 & Bhaba, 1994). Their disposition reflects that hijab is nothing more than a piece of garment chosen out of their own accord. They counter the stereotypes and the popular assumptions and negative connotations about hijab in all walks of life. They, unlike the common perception, show that women with hijab are neither negated agency nor decision making power, nor the right of free choice and independence in private and social life. They advocate feminist views and oppose patriarchal order by asserting hijab a garment chosen out of their own accord, which has neither been imposed on them nor it restricts their way of life nor make them lag behind their counterparts in their social life. Aneeka and Mona are democratic by temperament and liberal by approach in their way of life. But despite their such an approach, they are subjected to discriminatory treatment in public. They are looked upon with suspicion, bullied in public, humiliated and called names as well as spat at, and frequently subjected to intolerant behavior in public places merely because of wearing hijab. The study concludes that hijab itself is not the problem, but the reaction is triggered by the rising Islamophobia, cultural racism, growing intolerance to multiculturalism and dwindling secular values in the European countries.

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